

INSTRUCTIONHoliday Observances and Guidelines

The celebration of holidays in the curriculum and throughout the school year affords the opportunity for promoting understanding and respect among an increasingly diverse, growing population through multicultural learning experiences.

Staff may teach students objectively about various religions and cultures with emphasis upon their roles in American life. The following delineates how this may be achieved while avoiding a focus on one or two holidays or traditions, or crossing the line into religious education and indoctrination, which is expressly prohibited.

A. Calendar Committee

So as to facilitate the planning of administration and staff it is the responsibility of the Stafford County Public Schools Calendar Committee to publish and distribute a calendar of religious observances on or before July 1 of each year. The calendar will note occasions when such observances begin in the evening of the day prior to the holiday.

B. Administrative and Staff Planning

Each administrator and staff member is to consider how activities, including holiday activities, further the education and enrichment of students, which activities help them meet their goals, and how the activity can be of cultural and/or historical significance.

Scheduling of in-school events and parent programs, including field trips, yearbook pictures, and parent conferences, is to be done in such a manner as to avoid conflict with religious observances. Educational activities and presentations need not reflect the holiday or season in which they occur.

C. Administrative and Staff Implementation

A school may recognize holidays which also have religious significance to some. The religious significance is not, however, to be promoted or sponsored. Students are to be permitted to opt out of holiday-related events and programs because of strongly held religious sentiments. This option, however, should be viewed as a last resort. Schools giving incentives or awards based upon attendance are not to penalize students by withholding such recognition when student absence is attributable to religious reasons.

INSTRUCTIONHoliday Observances and Guidelines (continued)**D. Appropriateness of Activities**

Activities and programs are to be inclusive in nature reflecting the make-up of the overall county-wide community and not limited to the particular school or classroom. The appearance of favoring any religion over any other is to be avoided.

Devotional or religious exercises are prohibited as part of the school program. While it is appropriate to teach about religious practices, it is inappropriate to simulate a religious ceremony such as lighting the Menorah or candles for Advent. As classroom parties celebrating birthdays and holidays may conflict with the religious beliefs of some students, staff is directed to be sensitive to the needs of those students and to seek solutions other than exclusion of students from the classroom, a student, however, may still choose to opt out. The study of religious holidays and practices as part of the understanding of culture in foreign language classes is an appropriate learning activity and is permitted.

E. Instruction Concerning Religious Symbols

Symbols which identify or are associated with specific religious groups or specific religious and cultural holidays such as the cross, crescent, Star of David, and Native American symbols, may be part of an educational strategy to teach about the religion, holiday, or culture they represent. As religious symbols are intrinsically powerful tools for communicating information and emotion, particular care and awareness is to be taken by staff as to how these symbols affect community sensibilities.

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